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ABSTRACT

This review of the literature on prosocial behavior in the elderly provides empirical data on the prevalence of helping behaviors among the elderly and the range of motives underlying their helping. Implications of these data for theories of social behavior in later life are considered, and questions are raised about the validity of the models which have been implicit in much of existing research in social gerontology. Data on helping by the elderly are related to the dependency and autonomy models of social interaction. The potential for altruistic as opposed to extrinsic motivations for helping is considered, challenging the universal applicability of exchange principles to social interactions by older persons. Empirical evidence of prosocial behavior in late life is placed in the context of lifespan developmental theories of personality, and a contributory model of late life social behavior is proposed. (Author/JAC)

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BEYOND DEPENDENCY, AUTONOMY AND EXCHANGE: PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN LATE LIFE ADAPTATION

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RUNNING HEAD: Prosocial Behavior in Late Life Adaptation

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is on prosocial behavior in late life. Empirical data on prevalence of helping behaviors among the elderly and the range of motives underlying their helping is reviewed. The authors consider implications of these data for theories of social behavior in late life. Questions are raised with regard to the validity of models of social behavior in late life which have been implicit in much of existing research in social gerontology. Data on helping by the elderly are related to "dependency" and "autonomy" models of social interaction. Furthermore, the potential for altruistic as opposed to extrinsic motivations for helping is considered, challenging the universal applicability of exchange principles to social interactions by older persons. Empirical evidence of prosocial behavior in late life is placed in the context of lifespan developmental theories of personality and a contributory model of late life social behavior is proposed.

BEYOND DEPENDENCY, AUTONOMY AND EXCHANGE: PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN LATE LIFE ADAPTATION

Social interactions of the elderly have been the subject of extensive investigation (Rosow, 1967; Lowenthal and Robison, 1976; Kahana, 1982). However, the theoretical orientations governing empirical efforts have generally not been made explicit. A meta-analysis of existing studies reveals that three models underlie the preponderance of the existing research. These may be termed the dependency model, the autonomy model and the exchange model. This paper presents a fourth model--the prosocial or contributory model. This model has been investigated in the social psychological literature (Eisenberg, 1982; Midlarsky, 1984), but has seldom been considered as an explanation of social interaction among the elderly.

The objective of this paper is to outline the four models, and to explore their relative capacities to explain recently accruing data on the degree and nature of helping by the elderly. First, a review of the four models is presented, followed by discussion of research evidence regarding helping by the aged, and altruistic motives for such helping. Finally, we turn to theoretical formulations which support the developmental value of altruistic behavior in late life.

MODELS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION IN LATE LIFE

Table 1 presents a diagrammatic outline of alternative formulations regarding the nature of giving and receiving during late life implicit in diverse models of social behavior. Each of the models reviewed is also considered to represent a different value orientation within the behavioral and social sciences. The models outlined are presented in their most simple form in order to illustrate their approach to specific issues of giving and receiving by the aged. It is recognized of course that research based on these models reflects far more complex and multidimensional orientation in regards to other aspects of interpersonal behavior. Furthermore, it is important to note that the models

presented are not always mutually exclusive, and frequently refer to typologies of aging. Alternative models may explain behavior of different groups of elderly or even of the same groups in different situational or environmental contexts.

Dependency Model

This orientation is reflected in research focusing on dependency, vulnerability or service needs, wherein the emphasis is on various deficiencies of the aged (Kalish, 1969; Exton-Smith and Evans, 1977). Evidence for a dependency model of social interaction in late life comes from studies of personality change, indicating a more passive orientation by the aged than by younger persons (Riley and Foner, 1968). Typologies such as the "passive-dependent" personalities of the Kansas City studies of adult life (Neugarten, 1964) and the "rocking chair men" of Reichard, Livson and Peterson's study (1962) represent prototypes of dependent adaptation to aging. Accordingly, Baltes, Honn, Barton, Orzech, and Lago (1983) argue that dependence is not only a conspicuous characteristic of early childhood but also of old age.

Research based on a dependency model of aging typically grows out of the medical or social service orientation, and often describes the elderly as showing great needs for succorance coupled with few nurturance needs (Havighurst, 1973). Low levels of helping by the aged may be predicted, due to an inability to give because of few resources. The elderly are expected to portray a desire for social interaction. However, such interactions are characterized by a passive orientation and reflect a search for social supports from others (Goldfarb, 1969). The elderly are portrayed as dependent, needy of assistance, and as recipients of aid by others (Kalish, 1969). Focus of research reflecting a dependency orientation has primarily been on determinants or amelioration of various deficiencies among the elderly (Butler and Lewis, 1975). The burgeoning of studies on service needs, service utilization, and service provision for the

elderly also exemplify this genre of research (Exton-Smith and Evans, 1977; Ward, 1977; Cantor and Myer, 1978).

Autonomy Model of Late Life

Differentiation, separation and autonomy have traditionally been seen by developmental theorists as hallmarks of adult development (Giele, 1980). Gould's (1972) characterization of the unique features of later life refer to being freed to act as truly autonomous individuals during this life stage. Similarly, Kohlberg's (1969) stage theory of moral development posits autonomy as reflecting the highest developmental stage. According to this view, the elderly aim to extricate themselves from social demands and obligations (Cohler, 1983). Social interactions are minimized as there is an increasing innerdirectedness. This orientation shares some elements in common with a disengagement theory (Cummings and Henry, 1961) and with the Jungian view of increasing constriction of personality in late life (Jung, 1933). Supporting an autonomy based notion of social interactions is research indicating that there is greater self preoccupation in late life and greater "interiority" (Neugarten, Havighurst and Tobin, 1968). Greater intraversion has been observed in several developmental studies of personality (Neugarten, 1977; Schaie and Parham, 1976).

The autonomy model of aging may be seen as arising from an anthropological view of late life adaptation (Cohler, 1983). It predicts low levels of helping largely motivated by a desire to limit obligations to others. The aged are seen in this framework as generally withdrawing from social interactions with others, portraying little need for giving or receiving in social domains. There may be a desire for self fulfillment in relatively hedonistic ways centered around personal goals. Elderly residents of Florida retirement communities (Streib, 1983; Kahana and Kahana, 1983) were found to portray such autonomous value orientations. They were observed to find late life gratifications in self

improvement and to limit involvement or interactions with family and significant others.

Exchange Model

Among theoretical orientations explaining social behavior and interactions of the aged, exchange theory has been one of the most prominent and well-articulated conceptualizations (Dowd, 1980). The basic premise of this position (McDonald, 1981) is that individuals in social interactions attempt to maximize rewards and minimize costs, and strive to obtain outcomes which are most profitable to themselves. Much of human behavior, in this view, is based on a "norm of reciprocity," whereby social exchange is maintained only where all of the individuals involved are making a profit, and all payments made by individuals eventually balance out. This theory would predict that help is given either because one has received a service, expects to receive one, or is attempting to be worthy of one. In any given situation, the individual currently "indebted" to others is the one most likely to be of service. Hence, giving would be closely related to the extrinsic rewards that one has either received, or is expecting to receive.

In this model, the individual's sense of competence and self-presentation are seen as being affected by the exchange value of his or her power resources, and those with the greatest resources are able to dictate the terms of the exchange. Since in modern industrial U.S. society the elderly are seen as holding few power positions, their collective ability to benefit in social exchange relationships is viewed as limited (Clark and Anderson, 1967; Blau, 1964). Old age has been generally viewed in our society as carrying with it devalued status characteristics and even those resources possessed by older persons are seen as providing little power. Accordingly, old people tend to

internalize society's image of them as lacking in resources (Kahana, 1974) and hence, feel that they are not entitled to power in social exchanges.

The exchange model of aging is anchored in an economic model of human interactions. In this view one's level of "giving" is related to one's level of receiving. Thus, older persons give to others in anticipation of benefits to themselves. Table 1 depicts a paradigm of high level of both giving and receiving in an exchange framework reflecting expectations of reciprocity in giving (Wentowski, 1981). It is recognized however, that exchange theorists such as Dowd (1980) may consider the elderly to possess few power resources and hence, low levels of both giving and receiving are also compatible with this paradigm. Low or high levels of involvement with others may exist wherein elderly alternatively assume passive or active roles depending on the nature of the exchanges.

Contributory Model

Altruism theory differs from formulations based on social exchange, autonomy and dependency on the basis of the implied motivational basis for the behavior. In this theory, altruism is viewed as behavior that is motivated by the anticipation of positive consequences for another person, or by such intrinsic motives as the fulfillment of religious or moral commitments. While the altruistic individual may be gratified by the consequences of his or her actions, e.g., by experiencing a greater sense of competence (Midlarsky, 1984), well-being (Midlarsky and Kahana, 1981, 1983), empathic or vicarious pleasure (Aronfreed, 1969), the helpfulness was not motivated by the anticipation of such positive outcomes. Rather, it was the expected benefit to the other that served as the impetus, despite anticipated cost to the self. In the terms of certain social learning theorists, altruism refers to instances wherein individuals behave in a way designed to maximize rewards to another, even if it becomes necessary to

incur costs to themselves, and even though the costs to themselves may outweigh any extrinsically-based benefits (Midlarsky, 1984; Rushton, 1982; Bryan and London, 1970; Eisenberg, 1982).

The contributory model of aging arises from a humanistic and existential value orientation espoused by some developmental psychological theories (Erickson, 1963; Peck, 1968). In this view, levels of giving are expected to be high and the significance of the "giver" role is important to older persons. Giving to others is based on an intrinsic need for contributory involvement with others with motives often altruistic in nature. Hence, involvement with others is also predicted to be high. The older person engaged in prosocial behaviors is also predicted to assume an active role in social interactions.

Although gerontological research has not generally considered contributory roles by the aged (Smith, 1982), this view is consistent with recently articulated developmental views of Erickson (1977) which put an emphasis on "caring" as a primary bond in adulthood. It also fits with recent formulations (Gilligan, 1977) which question the traditional hierarchy of values underlying theories of adult development for putting a greater premium on autonomy than on "caring," loyalty and on a sense of responsibility or even sacrifice for others (Giele, 1980).

EMPIRICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HELPING BY THE AGED

The aim of the following discussion is examination of research evidence regarding the nature of helping by the aged. Underlying motives for helping are considered as they are relevant to the above outlined theoretical orientations regarding social interactions of the elderly.

Traditional focus of gerontological research has been on the elderly as recipients of services (Brickman et. al., 1982). Until recently, little systematic attention has been paid to the extent and nature of helping provided

to others by the elderly (Stewart and Smith, 1983). Yet there is evidence that the elderly are indeed motivated to help others. Not only do elderly persons engage in reciprocal helping and active exchanges of assistance, but they also provide help in the absence of direct reciprocity to altruistic and intrinsically motivated forms of helping as well.

Recent research on the elderly and their social networks has called attention to the importance of reciprocity in social relations of this group. Accordingly, a study by Wentowski (1981) provided evidence of the importance of reciprocity between older adults and those who provide help to them. Research based on a representative sample of community elderly (Prohaska and McAuley, 1982) indicates that older recipients of assistance also continue to give help to others. Direct reciprocation of assistance was most likely for social and interpersonal activities. Findings demonstrated elderly to be providers as well as recipients of help.

Reciprocal patterns of helping were found to characterize elderly persons and their families in a survey of social support networks of 302 urban elderly (Fairchild, Pruchno and Kahana, 1978). This study considered both reciprocal exchanges (elderly give as well as receive help) and complementary exchanges whereby the elderly are only providers or only recipients of aid. Findings revealed that older people generally give more tangibles than they receive. Furthermore, in exchanges with relatives "giving only" surpassed in frequency "receiving only." Findings also indicated that high morale was more frequently associated with "giving only" than with "receiving only" interactions.

Older persons also emerge as providers rather than as recipients of assistance in the family context. Thus, older persons generally serve as providers of financial assistance to adult children (Troll, Miller and Atchley, 1975). According to Cantor (1973), 75% of minority elderly report that they

provide help to their children. Elderly persons report helping their families regularly by providing repair work, housekeeping, nursing care, money and gifts to family members (Harris, 1975). Community surveys of older persons have also provided evidence that when three generational living arrangements prevail, generally the grandparent generation takes the role of caregiver to children and/or grandchildren who are experiencing life crises such as divorce or widowhood (Kahana and Kahana, 1980). During periods of crisis, even when they are not residing with their children, half of the elderly persons in a national sample reported giving their grandchildren some form of assistance (Shanas, 1967). In a study of three generations of ethnic women (Krause, 1978), grandmothers were found to be significantly more likely to be providers of support and assistance than were members of the mother or daughter generations. These data point to the prevalent patterns of older persons assuming the role of giver or helper in a family context.

Provision of help by the retired elderly is also prevalent in the non-familial residential context. Elderly neighbors tend to help each other in diverse ways ranging from giving of advice, social support to daily chores. The most important category of activities among neighbors has been found to be that of crisis or emergency intervention (Cantor, 1979). The role of neighbors is especially important for the elderly poor with no living relatives. For this group, help provided by elderly neighbors was found to be the primary way of coping with illness (Rosow, 1967).

The importance of elderly helpers within the residential context was also underscored in a recently completed study by the authors (Midlarsky and Kahana, 1983; Kahana and Midlarsky, 1983). A study of 114 residents of senior citizens' housing sites was conducted to consider the nature, importance and antecedents of helping among elderly residents. Helping was found to be a prevalent pattern of

behavior with 67% of respondents reporting that they provide a great deal of help to others and only 7% providing no help. Respondents frequently reported providing enduring and personally costly forms of assistance such as taking care of an ill friend or relatives for prolonged periods of time. There is also growing evidence indicating that the elderly are also inclined to provide services to the wider community through such activities as the performance of volunteer and charity work (Payne, 1977). Accordingly, the 1976 Harris Poll reports that 22% of elderly engage in organized volunteer work (Harris, 1975).

A review of anthropological research (Keith, 1982) on collectives for the elderly ranging from mobile home parks, highrise public housing and luxury condominiums, suggests that there is extensive aid given by peers. This peer helping network allows many older residents to feel secure without giving up their independence. Furthermore, a special benefit of provision of aid by peers is less likely to induce a feeling of dependency in recipients than would receipt of assistance from children or from formal organizations.

This research evidence underscores the prevalence and salience of prosocial behavior or contributory roles by the elderly. Nevertheless, observations of helping behavior by the aged are insufficient to determine whether motives based on altruism or exchange underly helping by the elderly. It may be argued based on behavioral data alone that unilateral helping is undertaken merely in anticipation of future exchanges or to build up credits in exchange relationships. We must turn to an examination of the motives for helping to gain a better understanding of the role of intrinsic vs. extrinsic factors in helping behavior of the elderly.

Evidence of Altruistic Orientations Among Older Persons

Evidence of an altruistic orientation among the elderly has been obtained in a number of recent studies by the authors (Midlarsky and Kahana, 1981, 1983;

Kahana and Midlarsky, 1982). In a study considering the relationship between internal-external locus of control, self concept and altruistic attitudes among residents of a retirement community, the great majority of elderly interviewed (84%) endorsed an altruistic orientation. These respondents placed high positive values on personally costly and unreciprocated forms of helping. Furthermore, those respondents who exhibited altruistic attitudes had significantly better self concepts and perceived health than those with less altruistic attitudes (Midlarsky and Kahana, 1981). These findings are consistent with observations by Christenson (1977) and Schaie and Parham (1976) who found increased humanitarian concerns in their studies of older age groups.

Data from studies of older persons relocating and undertaking long distance moves indicate that the assumption of contributory roles is seen as a central life task during late life by a significant proportion of adventurous elderly (Kahana and Kahana, 1983). Respondents often expressed a sense of relief and freedom in escaping the exchange oriented culture of work life and in being able to channel their energies into doing for others for intrinsic reasons. A frequently heard motive expressed by Israel-bound respondents for their desire to migrate was: "All my life I have done for my children and for my family - now I am free to do for others." Satisfaction with the move in turn proved to be related to actual helping opportunities and fulfillment of the desire to engage in altruistic behaviors.

A recent experimental study (Kahana and Midlarsky, 1983) furthermore reveals that when financial costs of helping are controlled for, donation behavior is most likely to be portrayed by the oldest age groups. In a second experiment requiring quick rescue response to assist an ill person, aged persons were more likely to help than were younger persons. In investigations by Trimakis and Nicolay (1974), altruistic responses by elderly residents of a housing project in

terms of pledges to donate money were found to be related to a positive self concept. In a survey of helping behavior among residents of senior housing sites conducted by the authors (Kahana and Midlarsky, 1982), respondents tended to help for altruistic reasons. In response to the question, "What do you consider to be the special rewards of help?" the majority (66%) considered the rewards of giving to be intrinsic in nature. Reasons for helping noted by respondents included perceived benefits to the recipient, a sense of usefulness or competence, and a sense of fulfilling religious obligations. A minority of respondents reported extrinsic rewards as salient ones in helping behavior.

These findings support the importance of altruistic motives for self-reported helping behavior by older persons. Thus, it appears that the majority engage in helping others primarily because of the beneficial outcomes to the recipient, or because of the psychological benefits they derive for so doing, rather than based on extrinsic rewards such as tangible forms of reciprocal helping, money or recognition (Blau, 1964).

> Sara, a 65-year old resident of a Detroit senior apartment complex provides an example of such behavior. She is involved in a social network within the residence. However, in addition to the daily favors and courtesies exchanged with neighbors, within the past six months she has begun to make daily visits to Joe, a double amputee who lives upstairs. Joe is nothing like her other neighbor friends, or like her husband, Sam. While they are cheerful and gregarious, he was best characterized when she first met him, as a surly loner filled with self-pit. Somehow she got into the habit of dropping in to visit Joe every day, saying a few cheerful words, and often bringing him something handmade. For the first month of her visits he seemed surlier than ever when she came to the door, and never thanked her, in word or deed. However, she noticed that he began to come out of his apartment and mingle with the other residents more than he ever had. He also seemed more relaxed and even smiled on occasion. The change in Joe, and her conviction that her visits and gifts were benefitting him was enough to keep Sara's visits going for several months. Sara seldom mentioned her visits to anyone even when people started to comment about the improvement in him.
>
> Another example is provided in considering Sam's case. Sam went to college for two years and then quit to start his own small business. During his career, his primary involvements were with family and his job. Now that he is 68 and living in a Senior residence, he feels that he has the time to devote to charitable causes. In addition to neighborly helping, and making

financial contributions to charity, last year Sam agreed to go from door-to-door in his apartment building and collect for a charitable cause. Sam hated every minute of this activity. He said that some of his neighbors were upset at being asked to contribute because they felt unable to give, and he felt bad about putting them on the spot. A few were even rude and unpleasant, or put him off on several occasions only to later shut the door in his face. Several neighbors began to avoid him, after being thus approached. Yet, Sam states that despite the unpleasantness of the experience, he continues to collect for this charity, and for others. "After all," he says, "I believe in these causes and someone has to do the unpleasant work of getting money that is so sorely needed."

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON HELPING BY THE ELDERLY FOR DEPENDENCY AND AUTONOMY

Models of Aging

Research evidence reviewed above regarding the salience and prevalence of helping behaviors among the elderly raises important questions about both dependency and autonomy based views of late life. It underscores the need by many elderly to engage in active social interactions where they provide diverse resources to family, friends, neighbors and even strangers. Thus, even if one were to accept the notion that the elderly possess few power resources on the macro "societal" level, generalizing belief in their powerlessness and lack of resources to the individual level of informal social interactions is likely to be misleading. There are compelling theoretical and empirical reasons to consider contributory roles of older adults and implications of these roles for previously discussed theoretical formulations.

Consideration of the social interactions of older persons reveals contributory potential throughout the lifespan. Providing help and assistance to others represent important aspects of self conceptions of the elderly which possess adaptive value even when other capacities of the helper are diminished. With increasing age and the waning of physical prowess, one may be less likely than during the earlier years to engage in rescue activities which are commonly considered as manifestations of altruism (Staub, 1979; London, 1970). On the other hand, advancing years bring an increase in time which may enable older

persons to engage in diverse forms of helping ranging from obtaining medical assistance for neighbors to fundraising for charitable organizations or participation in volunteer activities. In this sense focus on altruistic activities of the elderly may enhance the scope of behaviors legitimately considered by altruism researchers as well.

The Social Reconstruction model of late life adaptation proposed by Bengtson (1973) provides a pertinent explanation of the manner in which activity and the sense of well-being are related among older adults. In Bengtson's model, the older person may develop negative self-concepts through interactions with an environment which labels him/her as deficient, dependent, or incompetent. Accepting the unrealistic standards of performance of those around him - and the resultant negative labeling of himself - and concomitantly forgetting what his real competencies have been, the person may reinforce these negative perceptions by performing in an increasingly incompetent manner. A similar conceptualization is posed by theories referred to as "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1975; Langer, 1980).

The social reconstruction syndrome has been proposed (Kuypers and Bengtson, 1973) as a means of breaking such patterns of helplessness and uselessness by the aged. Social reconstruction is accomplished first by redefining social roles for the elderly retired person. Consideration of a broad spectrum of helping roles and contributory options for the elderly represent potential avenues for such social reconstruction.

Altruism and Exchange as Alternative Motives for Helping by the Aged

Exchange theory has been generally governed by economic principles, in which social interactions are seen as motivated by considerations of relative cost and reward (e.g., Homans, 1961; Gouldner, 1960; Thibaut and Kelley, 1959; Dowd, 1980). Exchange theorists occasionally entertain altruistic motives among the

decision rules governing individual exchange situations (Blau, 1964; Dowd, 1980). Nevertheless, the thrust of their formulations deals with the expectation of reciprocal assistance in explaining human interactions that involve helping.

In experimental studies based on an exchange theory framework (Dowd, 1980), rewards are typically extrinsic and materialistic. Where intrinsic motives are considered in an exchange framework, they are typically described as the motive to conform to a "norm of reciprocity," wherein the help received and the help given should be kept in balance. Nevertheless, a full consideration of motives for helping suggests this to be a limited view. Accordingly, there is evidence for the operation of other norms suggesting the existence of more altruistic reasons for helping. The "norm of giving" prescribes that help be given even when reciprocity is unlikely (Leeds, 1963), and the norm of social responsibility asserts that giving should be based on need rather than on the expectation that the favor will be returned (Berkowitz and Daniels, 1964, 1967; Midlarsky, 1968). These latter norms are more closely related to the expression of the individual's values than to the expectation of extrinsic rewards. Furthermore, altruistic persons have been found to demonstrate empathetic qualities, i.e., they have an ability or predisposition to feel what other persons are feeling (Davis, 1983).

In regard to the elderly, studies of psychological development in late life point to increasing individuation, and an augmented orientation to the expression of personal values. From this perspective, the responsiveness to the social responsibility norm and the norm of giving may be enhanced among older adults. Both altruism and empathy have been put forth as developmental concepts (Hoffman, 1977), however, their emergence has only been traced in the first half of the lifespan. Yet altruistic patterns of helping represent concepts which may be useful in consideration of late life behaviors and opportunities.

Older persons undergo many social losses and their opportunities for social exchanges may diminish (Rosow, 1967). For those whose motivation is dependent on extrinsic rewards and reinforcements, a disappointing period of deprivation is often in store. However, older persons who are able to engage in intrinsically rewarding behaviors are able to maintain far greater control over their lives in seeking satisfying experiences. Such a sense of control has been posited in recent gerontological research to serve as an important cornerstone of psychosocial well-being (Langer, 1980).

Helping Behavior and Developmental Theory

Erikson's (1963) theory of lifespan development provides evidence for considering intrinsic motivations to be a "giver" during the second half of the life cycle. Erikson proposes the stage of 'generativity' to precede the late life stage of integrity. He suggests that personal contributions arising from intrinsic motivations represents an important adult developmental task. The ability and propensity to give without expectation of a direct exchange is seen by Erikson (1963) as an important expression of maturity and successful resolution of midlife psychological development. In his most recent work, Erikson (1977) has placed even greater emphasis on caring as a primary task of adulthood.

Another theoretical framework which has emphasized the necessity of role redefinition in order to achieve adjustment in later life is Peck's (1968) expanded treatment of Erikson's (1963) last stage. In Peck's treatment, the aged achieve healthy functioning by resolving three major crises. In the first, "ego differentiation vs. work-role preoccupation," Peck stresses the need for an expanded ethic by noting that each person must face the question: Am I a worthwhile person only insofar as I can do a full-time job, or can I be worthwhile in other ways as a performer of several other roles, and also because

of the kind of person I am? (Peck, 1968). In the second crisis, "body transcendence vs. bodily preoccupation," the elderly need to shift their focus from bodily strength, beauty and well-being to social and mental facilities. The third crisis, "ego transcendence vs. ego-preoccupation," refers to the need by the elderly to deal with impending death through a shift in emphasis from the continuation of the self to the question of enduring impact of one's contributions to others. According to Peck, ego transcendence may best be achieved through a focus on contributions to the welfare of others. Furthermore, meaning for one's existence can be sought not only in concrete and immediate interactions with others. Symbolic definitions of one's contributions are likely to be more strongly valued in late life. An altruistic value orientation is thus consistent with existential mastery in late life.

The perspectives of Peck (1968) and Kuypers and Bengtson (1973) as outlined above emphasizes the need for elderly persons to retain their sense of self-worth and dignity through concentration on their contribution to society in a broad sense, rather than in a narrow one. Furthermore, rather than viewing old age as a period in which people "rest on their laurels" generated through past contributions, current contributions are likely to be important as well. One meaningful way in which persons may enhance the welfare of others, and in so doing, contribute to their own sense of mastery and well-being, is by providing help to others. Accordingly, a contributory model of aging is proposed here. This model which has been articulated in our earlier work (Midlarsky and Kahana, 1981) posits that by providing help to others, the elderly person may derive critical benefits, both by increasing his/her sense of mastery and by preventing the emotional problems which result from dependency and helplessness. In addition to the knowledge that one has made an important and worthwhile contribution, which may enhance the sense of current meaningfulness and value in

one's life, it is proposed that effective helping leads to the sense of competence, self esteem, and positive affect as well.

In this contributory model of successful aging, it is proposed that helping may comprise one important source of life satisfaction in later life. The adoption of a lifestyle in which helping of others is an important focus may be based on four kinds of antecedents: personal antecedents, resources (e.g., health and finances), motivational factors (e.g., the sense of personal morality in which helping is an important value), and situational variables (e.g., opportunities to help). It is proposed that successful helping in later years leads to the sense of competence, to high self esteem, and to positive morale, and that these, in turn, lead to a sense of life satisfaction, including the achievement of "meaningfulness and worthwhileness."

Conclusions

Recently accumulating data on the degree and nature of helping by the elderly raises questions regarding universal validity of the "dependency" and "autonomy" models of aging. Furthermore, reseach regarding motives for helping by the elderly does not provide support for the universal applicability of "exchange" formulations in describing social interactions of the elderly.

Although exchange theory represents a promising conceptualization for research and theory regarding social interaction and motivation in late life, it seems to leave many unanswered questions when invoked to explain human behavior and in particular, behavior patterns of older persons. Not only does exchange theory's reliance on economic and learning principles yield a pessimistic view of personal and social options for late life but it renders the elderly dependent respondents to stimuli which they cannot control.

An alternative formulation focusing on a contributory model of aging and recognizing the existence of altruistic motives in social interactions is

proposed. It is argued that such a view is consistent with a humanistic and developmental view of the aging process. A prosocial model of interactions in late life is posited as an important complement to frameworks which had been previously articulated.

Directing the attention of gerontologists to the importance of giving roles for the elderly serves numerous important functions. It promotes a recognition of contributory potential of aged, which in turn reduces learned helplessness. Focus on aspects of helping based on intrinsic motivation helps us move beyond a simplistic view of aging and allows for exploration of meaningful late life values and contributions for the elderly. Implications of a broader view of helping by the aged for gerontological practice include acknowledging the potential of older persons for greater control over their lives through the ability to gain personal gratification through intrinsically motivated help given to others. The altruistic elderly helper is not proposed here as representing a normative pattern. However, the very likelihood of his/her existence poses important challenges for the prevalent dependency, autonomy and exchange oriented views of aging.

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